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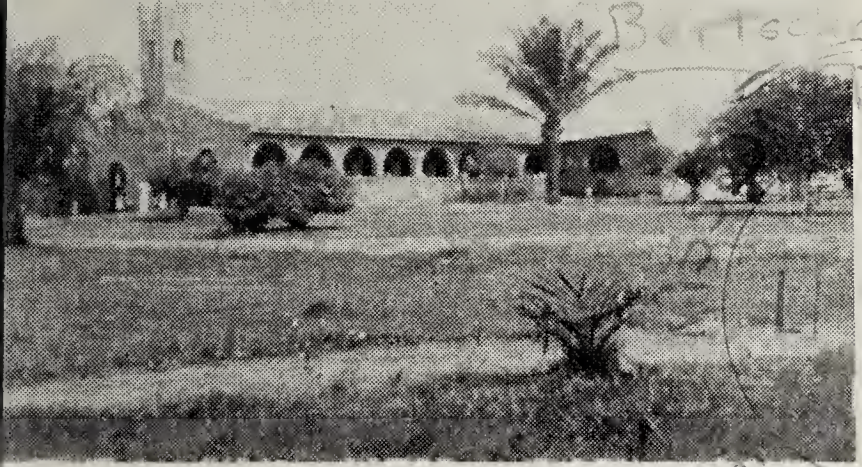


Charlesville Church, C. I. M.

"Upon this Rock I will build My Church" -- in CONGO

By JAMES E. BERTSCHE

WE WHO are mission minded and who have a special interest in the Congo Inland Mission need to be alert to the lessons which world-wide missions have to teach us. China, once a tremendous field and open door, is now closed to the Christian church. In other Asiatic areas, missionary work is becoming increasingly difficult because of political trends. Who today dares to venture a guess as to what the missionary map will look like ten years from now? Out of this uncertainty, one great certainty has become

Your investment in the Central Bible School will help

increasingly manifest. **The key to a strong church is a strong leadership.** The key to a dedicated church is a dedicated leadership. The key to a missionary-minded church is a leadership with vision. The key to a church which can stand amidst shifting economic and political sands is a leadership which can stand amidst such conditions.

It is timely that we of C.I.M. ask ourselves: "Where is our African Church in 1952? What sort of leadership has it in 1952? Should the missionary have to leave in 1952, what condition would the church be in by 1962?"

Background

In the early days of the mission when the work was in its pioneering stage among a heathen population, the requirements for African leadership were not so exacting. Each station had its own elementary school program. Among the Africans coming to school there were always those showing interest in Christian work. These, then, having had three or possibly four years of training consisting largely of the three R's and Bible, were placed in the villages as **teacher-evangelists.** To these simple shepherds and sowers of the Seed, we owe a tremendous debt of gratitude. The great bulk of our African Church membership today has come as a result of their faithful

Bible School Graduates and Teachers
Charlesville—1948

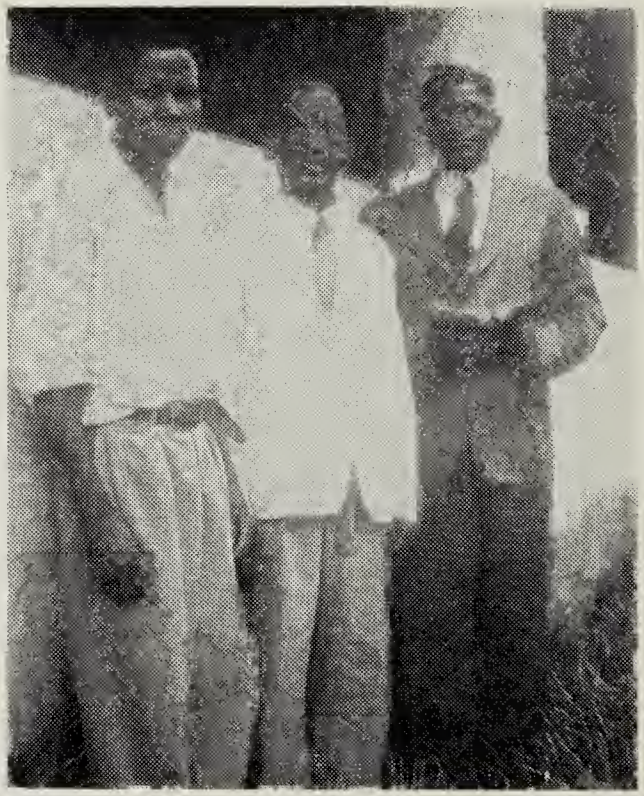
ministry.

As time passed and the mission program developed, the need was soon felt for more specific training for those among the teacher - evangelists who showed an interest in and capability for leadership among their people. To meet this need, two- and three-year Bible courses began to appear on the individual stations. As Africans finished their studies in these schools, they were placed in the out-districts as **overseers** charged with the counselling and guidance of the village teachers.

With the passing of time, certain among those overseers began to show particular ability and devotion to their work. As they proved themselves, some few began to be singled out for a special dedication to the work of the church. Thus our **assistant** pastors came into being. These men came to the aid of the missionary in dealing with problems in the church; examination of baptismal and marriage candidates; serving communion, and the actual baptism and marriage of Africans.

Present Day Situation

In 1952 in Congo, then, we have two levels of leadership in the church. First, this large group of



Present Overseers at Basongo

teacher-evangelists who are scattered far and wide through the bush in villages whose double task it is to conduct the simplest type of beginner's class for the children and to gather the professing believers periodically for worship, praise, prayer and instruction. Again I say, they have been limited in their preparation for their work, but they have done a magnificent job of reaching their own people. BUT NOW, the level of elementary schooling is gradually rising all over Congo. It is common now that a little 8- or 10-year-old chap will go to his home village for vacation having had more training in school than his old village evangelist. The standard and system which served so well yesterday are fast becoming inadequate today.

One of the Many C. I. M. Outstations

Look at the overseers. Where a few years ago, they had more training

than the teachers they were supervising, today the opposite is often the case. With improved teacher training on the field, young teachers are going out whose preparation for their work is far superior to that of their old district overseer. The African personnel of yesterday has an increasingly smaller place today.

Then look at our assistant pastors. A few years ago, they with their two or three years of simple Bible Training stood heads and shoulders above their fellow men and were very well prepared for the work they had to do. But today, the level of intelligence of the average church member is rapidly mounting. Where before the assistant pastor was the best instructed person in the community, now he has young people in his listening audience who surpass him by far and who cannot help but regard him and his sermon with a critical attitude.

Our Problem

The government in Congo has been quick to see the need for increasingly better trained teachers and has been just as quick to act. The government says: "We like the work the missions are doing. We want our teachers at all levels in Congo to be Christian teachers and we want all our education in

Congo to be Christian education. We know that it is only the Missions that can provide that. Therefore we want to help you in that task." Consequently, the government is helping in the erection of large new school buildings. It is helping with the expenses of new teacher training schools. It is helping with materials and equipment and the efficiency of our teachers is swiftly mounting as a result of it. That is a tremendous aid as far as the teaching staff is concerned. By giving our teachers better and more effective tools with which to work, their impact in proclaiming Christ to their students becomes sharper and more effective.

Medical Evangelist, Mukedi

But in the development of a church leadership to match this improving teaching staff, our mission has not as yet done anything positive. The government is helping in the Christian education phase of our work but the responsibility of matching this

with a corresponding emphasis on a developing church leadership rests squarely on the mission, and rightly so.

In 1952, we must have pastors who can stand before their congregations of village people, clerks, workmen, teachers, nurses, carpenters, telegraphists, chauffeurs, and what not, who can lead them intelligently and challenge them positively with the ever widening implications of the Gospel for their land.

Our Solution

The fact that nothing concrete has yet been done to meet this need is not to say that the missionaries on the field have been oblivious to it or unaware of it. There has been much prayer and thought given to it by missionaries—both singly and in groups and we feel that we see the course of action we must take. **That course of action is to establish a Central Bible and Pastoral Training School for the whole of our C.I.M. area in Congo.** It must be a school where the Bible will be seriously and systematically taught. There must be study of sermon preparation. There must be time given to some church history; (in competing with Roman Catholicism in Congo, nothing is more useful and effective than facts). There must be careful study of the

cardinal doctrines of the faith with careful consideration given to some of their implications for the everyday life of the African. There will also have to be some French taught. (The official language of the Congo is French, and if we want our pastors to be able to command respect in their communities, they must be able to meet other Africans in government employ on their own grounds.) There should even be a review of such fundamentals as geography, orthography, hygiene, etc., etc. In short, we must address ourselves to the task of training those of our African brethren who give evidence of the call of God upon their lives, the best possible preparation for the leading of their people in an Africa which is changing so rapidly.

C. I. M. Church Leaders Today

And it is here that you, our faithful Christian friends, may have a share.

The potential students are in Africa; the missionary personnel to staff this school will be there; a location is there for it. One thing, we will need some substantial cash gifts to put up class rooms and dormitories for the students. We will need to help the students with rations (food and a bit of clothing). Many of these students will be family men and if they spend their time in serious study, it is evident that we must help them during their school days.

The challenge is before us. It is not one that we may evade. We must have a Central Bible and Pastoral Training school immediately.

If this need speaks to you and you feel that you would like to have a share in meeting it, address a request for specific information to the C.I.M. office at 4610 So. Woodlawn Ave., Chicago 15, Ill.

The future stability of our Congo church is at stake.

Your gift now will bring results for years to come.

WAYS YOU CAN HELP IN THE TRAINING OF FUTURE CHURCH LEADERS OF CONGO

1. **By cooperating now in daily prayer** and intercession on behalf of the founding of C.I.M. Central Bible and Pastoral Training School. (The school will open in January, 1953, at Tshikapa, Congo Belge, Africa.)

2. **Pray for the first faculty—**
   Rev. A. D. Graber—Director
   Tshidi Lazalo—Teacher
   Rev. Allan Wiebe—Teacher
   Rev. Waldo Harder--Teacher

3. **Help the Bible School financially.**
   a. Contribute regularly to the evangelistic fund so that courses and instruction in the Bible School may be given tuition free.
   b. Give generously to the building fund.
   c. Invest in C.I.M. Annuities now to insure the future of the Bible School.

Send your gift to:

H. A. Driver, treasurer
CONGO INLAND MISSION
4610 South Woodlawn Avenue
Chicago 15, Illinois

Assistant pastor Kabanga Thomas and Church Council in Tshikapa

CONGO INLAND MISSION—Mennonites in Congo since 1912
Home Address—4610 S. Woodlawn, Chicago 15, Illinois